

NYTimes
Air War in Indochina: The Facts and the Myths

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To the Editor:

I was grieved to read Prof. Harvey Cox' recent Op-Ed article, "Wild Blue Yonder Revisited," because it plays games with the facts.

To understand my point of view, let me say that I served in 1964-65 as chief of the Reconnaissance and Photo Intelligence Division in Vietnam and as director of the Target Research and Analysis Center. I invented some of the technique used to locate the Vietcong in the jungles and helped develop the technique of using B-52's against Vietcong base areas.

Now Dr. Cox' "facts":

¶—He says "Mr. Nixon is dropping more bombs than Mr. Johnson." Here are the monthly tonnage rates on a yearly basis: 1966—41,500, 1967—77,000, 1968—120,000, 1969—115,000, 1970—81,000, 1971—65,000. If you average the first three years they make a lower average than the last three, but that distorts the true trend, which has been downward since 1968.

¶—He says "hundreds of Laotian villages have been made uninhabitable." According to the "World Book," about 300,000 people live in the mountainous parts of Laos. I have flown over the area, and there are not more than about fifty villages in the immediate vicinity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail where most of the bombing has taken place. If any are now uninhabitable, they were first occupied by the enemy.

¶—He speaks of "hundreds of thousands of people killed, wounded, or made homeless." Does he mean one killed, one wounded, and two-hundred thousand made homeless? One in any category is too many, but their sacrifice is not made more palatable by misrepresenting or distorting it.

¶—He says "by conservative estimates, 300 people a day still die in the air war." I know of no facts to support such a wild statement, and I know many facts which make me believe it to be highly unlikely. The main thing to keep in mind is that there is

no way for anybody on either side to know accurately the number of non-military people killed, but that great efforts are made by our side to avoid killing any civilians.

¶—He speaks of "decision to escalate the destroy-the-village-to-save-it tactic to the level of the whole countries. . . ." That is not and has never been a tactic. There are three types of bombing missions:

(1)—Pre-planned: Aimed at targets developed by intelligence on a systematic basis. Most of the targets are in guerrilla base areas, and Vietcong doctrine for the establishment of bases in remote areas fortunately makes it difficult to even drop a bomb near a village.

(2)—Close-support: Missions directed against targets marked by a forward air controller who is given the targets by the troops being supported. Such strikes sometimes are directed against populated places, if occupied by enemy troops, but they occur only where there is ground combat.

(3)—Armed Reconnaissance: Looks for targets of opportunity in an area of known enemy activity such as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Anyone who has studied the writings of Mao and General Giap on the nature of guerrilla war will understand that the establishment of remote bases is a key necessity. The bombing campaign in Southeast Asia has been directed mainly against those base areas, which hold few civilians.

The enemy, however, constantly attempts to divert the pressure by misrepresenting the nature of this bombing campaign. Events in recent years, as well as the shrillness of the enemy and his supporters, suggest that the bombing campaign has had its effect.

Neither our bombing campaign nor the nature of the war fits the myths of Dr. Cox' article.

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